

## Shrink heating bills this winter season

By Jennifer Fetterly  
*The Northside News*

When winter temperatures drop and heating bills rise, MGE Community Service Manager Annette Miller starts to hear her phone ring. The calls are from people who have just opened their first winter utility bill and want energy saving tips.

Miller said there are few basic steps that can be taken to save energy and money. She said people usually know the basic ways to save money on utilities but don't often follow through.

"When it comes to saving energy people need to be conscientious," she said. At home Miller said she follows her own advice to help save money and found out it pays off.

MGE experts estimate heating cost make up 40% of a household's energy use. Miller said a key way to save money is to control your thermostat. She said thermostat should be lowered 68 degrees Fahrenheit or lower at night or when not at home, but don't go lower than 55 degrees. Homeowners can also increase their furnace's efficiency by changing or cleaning filters once a month during the heating season. If your furnace is inefficient (60% or less), consider replacing it with a newer, more efficient model.

During the upcoming holiday season there are even more ways to save energy and money. There is no need to be

an Ebenezer Scrooge when it comes to putting up holiday lights, Miller said. She said using LED (light-emitting diode) lights save money, last longer and are safer than traditional lights.

Part of Miller's job is to go out in the community to teach people how to save money and energy. People who want to learn how to be more energy efficient can attend a free 30-minute workshop to learn energy-saving tips. She said hundreds of people take part in the workshops each year. MGE is also trying to reach more community groups by providing energy-saving information to Spanish-speaking and Hmong residents

Here are some more helpful tips to cut energy costs:

Switch to compact fluorescents. Fluorescent lights may be more expensive to buy initially, but in the long run they will save you money, Miller said.

Wash in cold water. MGE experts say 90 percent of the energy used in washing machines is used for heating water.

Turn juice off when not in use. It's a catchy reminder for people who leave televisions and lights on when not needed.

Look for the ENERGY STAR label. This label will point consumers in the right direction when looking for energy saving appliances.

For more home energy advice contact MGE at (608) 252-7117 or visit online at [www.mge.com](http://www.mge.com).

## There's no place like a safe home for the holidays

By Lori Wirth

*Madison Fire Dept.*

Interest in holiday decorations has picked up speed in recent years, but additional decorations require greater attention to safety considerations.

### Consider these facts and figures:

In 2002, there were 240 Christmas tree fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 23 deaths, 12 injuries and \$11.4 million in direct property damage.

During 1999-2002, an average 310 home fires started when Christmas trees ignited. These fires caused an estimated annual average of 14 civilian deaths, 40 civilian injuries and \$16.2 million in direct property damage.

Fourteen percent of the candle fires occurred in December. This is almost twice the 8% monthly average. Christmas was the peak day for home candle fires. Ten percent of the home fires reported on Christmas were started by candles.

*The City of Madison Fire Department recommends these tips for safety during the holidays:*

### Holiday Lights & Decorations

\*Use caution with holiday decorations and whenever possible, choose those made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.

\*Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible materials, and do not use candles to decorate

Christmas trees.

\*Purchase only lights and electrical decorations bearing the name of an independent testing lab, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance.

\*Carefully inspect new and previously used light strings and replace damaged items before plugging lights in. Do not overload extension cords.

\*Always unplug lights before replacing light bulbs or fuses.

\*Don't mount lights in any way that can damage the cord's wire insulation (i.e., using clips, not nails).

\*Keep children and pets away from light strings and electrical decorations.

\*Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.

### Holiday entertaining

\*Unattended cooking remains the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. When cooking for holiday visitors, remember to keep an eye on the range.

\*If you allow smoking in your home, provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays and check them frequently. After a party, always check on, between and under upholstery and cushions and inside trash cans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.

\*Keep matches and lighters up high, out of sight and reach of children.

\*Test your smoke alarms, and let overnight guests know what your fire escape plan is.

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# turn it down when you're not around



Save energy and money this winter. Turn back your thermostat while asleep or at work. Each degree can save 1% on your heating bill. If we all set back 1°, we'll save enough gas for 3,100 homes. Bigger setbacks save even more. That's the power of working together.

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